

Documents on Diplomacy: The Source

The United States and the World Community

A Radio Address by Former Secretary of State Frank B. Kellogg, October 30, 1935

THE right thinking American citizens desire that our country keep out of war; but at the present time the most superficial observer as well as the person who is doing the cause of peace the most harm is he who says that the situation in the world today is the same as that which prevailed in 1914. A small but vociferous group of isolationists have created for themselves an unreal world based upon the conditions of 1914. They fail to realize how different is the world of 1935.

Let us compare: The Pact of Paris, the League of Nations and many treaties for the prevention of war are the symbols of a very different world. In 1914 war was an accepted method for the settlement of international disputes with which no nation other than the belligerents had a right to interfere. The nations who went to war in that fateful year violated no general principle of international law in so doing. International law was to a great extent a code under which a duel between nations could be carried on. While many enlightened individuals opposed war upon principle, there was then no general public opinion against it as a nation's legal right, nor had there been any organization of a community of nations to outlaw it.

On the other hand, today we have the Pact of Paris, by which all nations in language simple and emphatic, first renounced war as an instrument of national policy in their relations with one another, and secondly agreed that the settlement of disputes of whatever nature which might arise among them should never be sought except by pacific means. Today 51 nations are taking positive action to stop a nation that is invading the territory of another signatory of the Pact of Paris. The majority of these nations find it embarrassing to declare sanctions against Italy, but they are putting their obligations above individual inclinations.

A few weeks ago the Foreign Minister of the British Empire announced that his country was ready to consider the question of access to raw materials on the part of nations in a less fortunate economic position. Who would have dreamed in 1914 that war could be outlawed; that over 50 nations would make the sovereignty of a comparatively backward state the symbol of collective efforts to preserve peace? Who would have dreamed that the great powers who have so much of this world's goods would talk about removing

the economic causes of war and dividing up with the nations that are in a difficult economic situation?

The development of a community of nations solemnly binding themselves to settle their disputes by pacific means is necessarily a slow and painful process. Some times the moral light of the Pact of Paris seems to grow dim, but I have faith that in the end the principles represented by that treaty will prevail. But this much we know—over 50 nations representing practically the entire population of the world regard war not only as a moral issue but as an economic catastrophe, and its elimination the supreme task of their generation. It is inevitable that this be so. Each generation seems to have its tasks of human advancement. Each generation that is worth while penetrates a new frontier of human advancement. Our world, shrunk by means of travel and communication to a very small area, can go no farther in this development until the scourge of war has been eliminated. All efforts a human betterment are held in abeyance until our generation can answer the question: "Can war be finally eliminated and the habit of peace be the means for the settlement of disputes?" Despite all of the dangers of the hour, I believe that in the last 15 years, through the Pact of Paris, the League of Nations Covenant, the various systems of arbitration and conciliation and the education of the people, the world has made more progress in the elimination of war than in all the previous centuries.

The relation of the United States to this situation cannot be ignored. There are those who would have the United States avoid war by reducing contact with other nations to a minimum and by maintaining complete isolation as to any dispute that might arise. But, fortunately or unfortunately, 125,000,000 people, dominated both spiritually and financially by the spirit of the age, cannot isolate themselves from the world or from taking a stand on its problems, no matter how much we would like to do so.

The United States is a signatory to the Pact of Paris through which the nations renounced war as an instrument of national policy and agreed to settle their disputes only by peaceful means. To say the United States may regard war as a duel between nations toward which its citizens should be neutral as far as sympathy is concerned and impartial as far as condemnation is concerned, is completely out of harmony with the Pact of Paris. What the

American people seem to have forgotten and what the Italian people or their government seem to have entirely ignored, is that when Italy invaded Ethiopia and thus beyond a shadow of a doubt proceeded to use war as an instrument of national policy. Italy violated a treaty with the United States and thus violated the supreme law of our land.

Let me repeat what I said in my note to the French Ambassador on February 27, 1928—"From the broad standpoint of humanity and civilization, all war is an assault upon human existence and should be suppressed in the common interest."

I wish that those who are considering trading with Italy, despite the President's warning that they trade with belligerents at their own risk, might have it borne home to them constantly that in supplying oil, cotton or lathes they are aiding and abetting a nation that is treating a solemn treaty with the United States as a scrap of paper. I could not make this talk without expressing my approval of the Administration's stand to keep the United States out of war. The Secretary of State by moral persuasion secured the cancellation of the Ethiopian oil lease to American interests. The President has very properly, by virtue of the authority vested in him at the last session of Congress, declared an arms embargo against both sides and warned Americans that they travel on belligerent vessels at their own risk, and that any trade with belligerents is at their own risk. It may be claimed that under the strict interpretation of international law American citizens have a right to trade with belligerents, but I believe the President has fairly interpreted the spirit of the American people.

The American people have two overwhelming desires at the present time. They wish to avoid war and are willing to pay whatever price is necessary to avoid it. Secondly, they wish to see

efforts for permanent peace Succeed and are willing to cooperate for the maintenance of peace provided it does not involve the country in war

The Questions involved in this war or any other war are not only moral but economic. Naturally we think first of the great tragedy of the millions of wounded and dead from the actual conflict. But the material losses of the World War surpassed anything known in history. No country derived any benefit from that great conflict. The suffering of the peoples from the great material losses then sustained not only continue to the present time but will last through the years to come. Such losses cannot be confined to the countries directly involved in the war They are world wide. They affect conditions of life among all nations.

It is important that the United States try to keep out of war. It is even more important that the United States Help in every practicable and legitimate way to prevent war and cooperate with the efforts of other nations to Ibis end.

In his note to the League of Nations on October 26th the Secretary of State concluded with the significant statement that the United States "views with sympathetic interest the individual or concerted efforts of other nations to preserve peace or to localize and shorten the duration of war." I sincerely hope that this statement of Secretary Hull's showing our sympathetic interest will lead to whatever further steps are necessary and practicable to assist the League in this crisis.

The United States in common with other countries can and should designate Italy as the aggressor in its flagrant violation of the sovereignty of another nation, denounce Italy's violation of its treaty obligations and announce that it will take no step to interfere with or nullify the measures that other nations are now taking to put a stop to this war. ■

Source

The Avalon Project: Documents in Law, History, and Diplomacy, Yale Law School, Lillian Goldman Law Library.

http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/kb1935.asp